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Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke
van die Kaap, Natal en Transvaal

Dutch Reformed Church
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CHURCH OPPOSES LIQUOR ACT

The Liquor Amendment Act, which enables any Bantu over the age of 18 to buy any type of liquor, has been passed by the South African Parliament in spite of strong opposition by the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and other churches. The act goes much further than the concessions recommended by a government committee some months ago, and came as a surprise when it was first published.

The act empowers local authorities to establish facilities for on and off consumption in Bantu townships. The existing provisions for on-consumption facilities for Coloureds in the Cape and Indians in Natal are extended to the rest of the country and there will no longer be any limit to the amount of liquor that may be purchased by Coloureds and Asiatics. The act also provides for increased penalties for drunkenness and the making and consumption of illegal concoctions.

The parliamentary opposition allowed a free vote on the bill and several of its members voted against it. The government caucus supported the legislation, but gave some of its members permission to abstain from voting. One opposition member of parliament called the act "a liberalisation of our race laws to remove one of the greatest evils in our society — the illicit liquor trade". The Minister of Justice said that the government accepted the principle of the act, particularly because since last year's riots it had been told that the non-whites had had a grievance as there was discrimination against them as far as the supply of liquor was concerned.

The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk's Federal Council for Combating Social Evils condemned the proposals. The council said in a statement that the proposals would lead to the demoralisation of the non-whites and place a major obstacle in the way of missionary work. "The bill does not take into account the fact that the majority of Bantu live in primitive conditions and have not reached a standard of civilisation under which they would be proof against the devastating effects of alcohol," the council

stated. It was also argued that the new law would not make matters easier for the police and that illicit liquor dealings would continue despite the increased facilities.

The president of the Methodist Conference of South Africa, the Rev. F. H. Edmunds, expressed his church's "shock and alarm" at the proposals. The chairman of the general assembly of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, on the other hand, said that his church was in favour of the step. The South African Temperance Alliance feared that "Christianity may suffer a severe set-back" and stated that the efforts of different denominations to prevent the introduction of such legislation had failed.

According to the alliance, consistent opposition to the earlier light wine proposals had come from the archbishop and bishops of the Church of the Province of S.A. (Anglican), the Roman Catholic archbishop and apostolic delegate, the president of the Methodist Conference, the general secretary of the Presbyterian Church, the president of the S.A. Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, the chairman of the Congregational Union, the president of the Baptist Assembly, the territorial commander of the Salvation Army, and the moderators of Dutch Reformed Church synods. When the bill was considered by parliament, however, individual ministers of some churches expressed themselves in favour of the legislation.

REPUBLIC SEEKS HAPPINESS

"We respectfully bow our heads before the unfathomable majesty of our Creator for this wonderful act of providence which He has allowed to happen in His own time," said Mr. C. R. Swart in his address to the nation after his induction as the first State President of the Republic of South Africa on 31st May.

Mr. Swart referred to the first part of the preamble to the Constitution (quoted in our previous issue) and continued: "In accordance with this and out of our own conviction, we return thanks to the Almighty for this momentous occasion in our nation's affairs . . . With full awareness of my many shortcomings, I accept the task in the spirit of the promises contained in the solemn oath which I took in the church this morning. I believe that the prayer at the end of it will be heard by God in His mercy and that He will lead me and sustain me to fulfil this oath with honour. He has promised that where He lays burdens He will also provide the strength to carry them."

The State President stressed that he would act as the head of state for one and all of the different population groups jointly — for all racial, language and colour groups. The advent of the Republic should not be seen as a victory of one section over the other, but as the inevitable accomplishment of constitutional development. "The greatest desire of our hearts and of our whole being is that we want to be happy in our own country. Happiness for ourselves and our children, happiness for our fellow countrymen of all races and colours, happiness for our country in the comity of nations — that is our fervent desire," he said.

The two clergymen who officiated at the induction ceremony were the Rev. P. S. Z. Coetzee, moderator of the Orange Free State Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, and the Rt. Rev. E. G. Knapp-Fischer, Anglican bishop of Pretoria. Two specially bound Afrikaans and English Bibles, presented by the British and Foreign Bible Society, were used at the ceremony. Representatives of various non-white groups attended the ceremony in the church and afterwards occupied front seats at the public gathering on Church Square.

The Pretoria Central Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk), where the induction took place, was built 57 years ago and can seat 1,400 people. The foundation stone was laid by General Louis Botha, first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, and the well-known Dr. Andrew Murray conducted the inauguration service. The late King George VI and his family, including the present Queen of Great Britain, attended a service there during the Royal visit of 1947. The funeral services of one former Governor-General (Dr. E. G. Jansen) and two Prime Ministers (General Louis Botha and General J. C. Smuts) were held in the same church.

At a dedication service in Cape Town, broadcast by the South African Broadcasting Corporation shortly after midnight on 31st May, the Rev. Dr. A. J. van der Merwe, moderator of the Cape Synod, said that while we rejoiced about becoming a republic, we should not forget that part of the nation whose hearts had been wounded because of South Africa leaving the Commonwealth. "The republic is not a magic wand which will solve our problems," he stated. "A new disposition of mutual trust is needed between the various groups in the country."

The executive committee of the Christian Council of South Africa conveyed to the State President its Christian greeting and assured him of its allegiance. The committee said: "In looking forward to a new era in the history of the country we love, and seek always to serve, we recognise that this love and service is part of and is subordinate to our love and service to God and to His Son our Lord. We pray that these two allegiances may never be divided, and that the new Republic will serve all its people without favour in accordance with their dignity and worth as children of God." At a conference of the Federation of Synagogues Chief Rabbi L. I. Rabinowitz said that "We will give the same loyalty to the Republic of South Africa as we gave to the Union of South Africa within the Commonwealth", while Roman Catholic Archbishop Owen McCann stated in a letter read in all churches of his archdiocese that "while declaring allegiance to the lawfully constituted civil authority, we have to acknowledge the supreme dominion of Almighty God over nations and peoples and over our country and ourselves".

The three-day strike propagated by certain non-white extremists failed. On 29th May it was reported that "South Africa has never had a gloomier press in Britain. An air of impending doom dominates all comment here as the day of formal severance approaches". The next day, however, newspaper headlines read: "British press calls it (the strike) a flop", and one

government newspaper stated: "The white people of the Republic will not forget the share of the non-whites in the peaceful and orderly establishment of the Republic."

MESSAGE TO COLOUREDS

A statement issued by the moderamen (executive committee) of the synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (Dutch Reformed Mission Church) of South Africa — a church with a membership of almost 300,000 Coloureds — said that the church was "deeply perturbed" because of deteriorating relations between whites and Coloureds regarding political matters. The moderamen asked the members of the church to remain calm in this "time of crisis" and to obey the law. At the same time the authorities were told that "all children of South Africa must be treated fairly and in a Christian way".

The statement said the Mission Church had never and did not feel itself obliged to invade the terrain of matters of state, because that was not its calling and not the task of the Church of Christ. On the other hand the church would not be true to its calling if it did not, in these days, make itself heard "and for these reasons the moderamen has decided to issue a statement, which must be seen by the authorities and underlings as an honest attempt to stimulate amity, Christian responsibility and co-operation in our common country in these days of crisis".

The statement continued: "In the first instance we call upon the Coloureds of the Mission Church at all times and especially now that South Africa (which is also their mother country) enters a new era, to be calm, cautious and responsible and to maintain law and order — and even though there may be provocation, to remain worthy of the name Christians.

"We want to assure the people of our church that we, as preachers of the Gospel in the Mission Church, do not stand unsympathetic towards some grievances they may have regarding the treatment they receive as a group. We admit that some measures not only touch them personally but also cut deeply into their personal, family, social and religious life. But we want to impress upon the members of our Church to adhere to God's teachings and obey them under all circumstances, to be obedient to every human stipulation for Christ's sake — and especially towards the highest government authority."

The statement added that the whole of the Coloured community might rest assured that the Mission Church and many South Africans were standing by them to further their interests in all spheres constitutionally. But "reactionary and revolutionary action cannot be approved of because it is un-Christian and contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures and will only divided the white and non-white Christians all the more".

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